

GK-AIMS Evaluation

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Introduction

GK-AIMS (Global Knowledge - Activity Information Management System) was initiated in June of 1998. The purpose of this project is to facilitate information sharing among project planners who are trying to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to build the information, communications, and knowledge resources of developing countries. Specifically, the project seeks to create a set of web-based information resources to help the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) share information and coordinate project planning.

Bellanet, which seeks to support collaboration in the development community, developed and hosted GK-AIMS with the support of the InfoDev program and the World Bank Institute. GK-AIMS includes four major elements: a project database; an electronic repository that can be used to share documents; a database that contains profiles of GK partner organizations; and a calendar for sharing information about upcoming events.

The project and activity database includes detailed information about the specific activities in which GKP Partners are involved. Entries often include such information as budgets, locations, contact names, and project abstracts. The electronic repository is a collection of electronic files and Internet links related to the key areas of interest to the GKP. The profiles of GK partner organizations describe the organizations as well as their major ICT and knowledge-management programs. Information on upcoming workshops, seminars, and conferences is included as part of the events calendar.

Because the initial phase of this project was about to come to a conclusion, an evaluation was conducted in early 2000. The evaluation was designed to learn how to better facilitate the sharing of planning information between GK partners. Its main focus was on identifying lessons that could be learned and applied to future efforts; however, the evaluation also looked at what the project does and how people and organizations are reacting to the project's activities.

Methods

Discussions were held with the GK-AIMS project manager in Bellanet and a representative of the Evaluation Unit of IDRC to define the objective of the evaluation. These discussions helped focus the evaluation on the type of information that was needed for decision-making, the appropriate sources of this information, the mix of data-collection methods that were most likely

to be effective, and the outputs that were expected from the evaluation.

As an initial step, a preliminary e-mail survey (Appendix 1) was designed and administered to identify the outcomes that were expected from GK-AIMS by staff of InfoDev, the GKP Secretariat, and Bellanet. A meeting was subsequently held with key stakeholders to discuss the input from this initial survey and to ensure that the evaluation would focus on the key questions these people want to have answered by the evaluation. Agreement was reached that the evaluation should be designed to answer the following questions:

- Are there flaws in the design or underlying assumptions upon which GK-AIMS was based?
- Are the tools and methods that were used sound and appropriate?
- What factors affect whether people will or will not share project information or enter data into a database system?
- Has GK-AIMS made changes in how information is shared among GK partners?
- Have any of the GK partners derived benefit from GK-AIMS? For example, with regard to developing new projects or different types of projects, or collaborating with new partners.
- Are other project information systems available and being used by GK partners?

Following this consultation, an email survey (Appendix 2) was designed and administered to 130 people. This survey was sent to: 12 people who had communicated via the gkaims@bellanet.org mailing address; 24 who had contributed projects to the system; 25 who were associated with a username/password in the system; and 69 current GKP partners. In addition, telephone interviews (Appendix 3) were requested of 10 individuals who had long-term interactions with the project. Contacts for all those surveyed and interviewed were provided by the GK-AIMS project manager.

Data collection took place over a 5-week period from 17 January to 18 February 2000. An interim report highlighting the key findings of the evaluation (see Appendix 4) was presented to Bellanet on 29 February to allow this information to be shared during the Global Knowledge (GK II) Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in early March. This report presents the main findings and the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

Findings

Responses to the email survey were received from 45 people (response rate 35%). Of these 45 responses, 34 provided detailed replies and 11 refused to reply but did provide comments about GK-AIMS. In addition, 7 telephone interviews were conducted. Many people were involved in preparations for GK II during the period of the survey, and this may have reduced the number of replies that were received. The findings that are presented here are based on an analysis of the responses to the email questionnaire; whereas, the conclusions are based on the responses to the questionnaire as well as input received during the interviews. Where ratings are provided, the scale used was 1 to 4 (with 1 representing “low” and 4 representing “high”).

Respondents — More than 65% of those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they were directly involved in managing project and program information and in planning and developing projects and programs. The balance managed information systems or provided technical and administrative support. Forty-six percent of respondents indicated they were executives or senior managers. The others who replied included information officers, librarians, and consultants.

Information Requirements — Respondents were asked to rate how important the sharing of different types of information with other organizations was to their jobs (Table 1). The types of information that respondents rated as being most important to share were: information on on-going projects (3.3) followed by reports on ICTs and development (3.2), information on planned and proposed projects (3.1), and information on completed projects (3.0).

Responsibility for Information Sharing — In almost all of the organizations, it is senior managers (17) and project or program staff (24) who are responsible for managing information about project planning and monitoring. In 11 cases, both categories of personnel were indicated on the survey, which may suggest that both senior managers and program staff are responsible, that in some organizations senior managers also share project responsibilities, or that one group is responsible for planning and one for monitoring. In any case, it is clear that such staff are the most commonly responsible for information sharing about projects (in comparison, only 8 responses in total indicated that technical or administrative support staff, staff in a centralized information management department, public information or communications officers, or librarians had responsibility for sharing project information).

Information Sources — Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several sources of

information they might use in their daily work (Table 2). Personal contacts (3.6) are the most important sources of information about development projects and programs. Other important sources are direct sharing of information with other organizations (3.3) and other websites (3.1). In comparison, GK-AIMS received a rating of 1.9.

Table 1. Importance placed on sharing different types of information with other organizations. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not important” and number 4 “very important”.

	No. of responses	Avg. rating
Information about planned or proposed projects	34	3.1
Information about on-going projects	34	3.3
Information about completed projects	34	3.0
Organizational profiles	33	2.5
Upcoming events and workshops	32	2.8
Policy papers	32	2.9
Reports on ICTs and development	31	3.2

Table 2. Importance placed on sources of information about development projects and programs? Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not important” and number 4 “very important”.

	No. of responses	Avg. rating
GK-AIMS	29	1.9
INDIX	19	1.3
Other websites	32	3.1
Publications and newsletters	29	2.6
Direct sharing of information with other organizations	30	3.3
Personal contacts	30	3.6

Use of GK-AIMS — Respondents were asked whether or not their organization used GK-AIMS. Fifteen reported that they did, 6 said they used it “rarely”, and 12 said that their organization did not use GK-AIMS. Those who do not use GK-AIMS cited a range of reasons, but the most common are that it takes too long, represents a duplication of effort, and that they do not see the value in contributing data.

Information Provision to GK-AIMS — Of those who indicated that their organizations submit information to GK-AIMS, 74% of the respondents are responsible for entering the data themselves. All of the organizations that provide information do so about on-going projects. Of these organizations, 73% also provide organizational profiles, 68% contribute information about completed projects, and 55% provide information about planned and proposed projects and about

Table 3. Effectiveness of various methods in changing willingness to share planning information with other GK partners. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not effective” and number 4 “very effective”.

	No. of responses	Avg. rating
Communications and encouragement from GK-AIMS staff	21	2.5
Face-to-face visits by GK-AIMS staff	18	2.3
Training and awareness sessions	19	2.2
Communications/encouragement from the GKP Secretariat	19	2.1
Need to prepare for GK II in Kuala Lumpur	20	2.1
Systems that automatically feed information to GK-AIMS	18	2.4
Presented with evidence that others are using the system	18	2.9

Table 4. Effectiveness of various methods in changing ability to share planning information with other GK partners. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not effective” and number 4 “very effective”.

	No. of responses	Avg. rating
Communications from GK-AIMS staff	18	2.7
Face-to-face visits by GK-AIMS staff	14	2.4
Communications/encouragement from the GKP Secretariat	17	1.8
Systems that automatically feed information into GK-AIMS	15	2.3
Email and telephone support	17	2.5
Training materials	14	2.0
Training seminars	14	2.2

events and workshops. Only 32% provide documents and reports. Asked which methods they would prefer to use to enter data into GK-AIMS, 38% of respondents would prefer to use web-based forms; whereas, 17% would prefer to use IDML/XML automated data transfers. One-fifth of respondents indicated that they did not understand the technical differences between the options that were presented.

Effectiveness of Methods Used by GK-AIMS — Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of various methods used by GK-AIMS to enhance the willingness of staff and organizations to share planning information with other GK partners (Table 3). As well, a followup question asked about the effectiveness of various methods that were used to help changes partners’ ability to share planning information (Table 4). Respondents reported they

were most likely to become more willing to share planning information because of being presented with evidence that others are using the system (2.9) and because of communications and encouragement from GK-AIMS staff (2.5). The other five methods (Table 4) were nearly the same in their “effectiveness” rating (2.4 to 2.1). In terms of supporting partners’ ability to share, communications and encouragement from GK-AIMS staff was rated as most effective (2.7), followed by email and telephone support (2.5). The other five methods were once again rated to be close in effectiveness (2.4 to 1.8). Interactions with the GK-AIMS project were rated to have made little change on individual (2.0) and organizational (1.6) willingness to share planning information. More people (60%) reported that there was no change in the type of information they now share, than reported that they now share more information than they used to (40%).

Other Methods Used to Share Information — Almost all respondents (97%) use other methods or systems to share project information, information about their organization, and forward-planning information with their partners and the public. Of those who provided additional detail, more than three-quarters use their own website or email to share information.

Information Use from GK-AIMS — GK-AIMS is used as a source of information by 69% of those who replied to the questionnaire (of these people, 41% use GK-AIMS “rarely”). Those who do not use GK-AIMS most often reported that it takes too long, or that they were unfamiliar with the system, they could get the information elsewhere, or they still needed to learn more about the technology before they could use the system. Those who use GK-AIMS use all of the types of information that are provided almost equally. Information on on-going projects was used by 17 respondents, information on planned/proposed projects was used by 16, documents and reports on ICTs and development were used by 15, organizational profiles were used by 13 as was information on events and workshops, and 12 respondents used information on completed projects.

Effectiveness of Methods Used by GK-AIMS — Of the methods used by GK-AIMS to help partners use or benefit from the planning information provided by other GK partners, providing an easy to use website was rated as being most effective (3.6), followed by profiling recent contributions on the GKP listserv (3.2). All other methods ranged in effectiveness from 3.0 to 2.5 (Table 5). Respondents indicated that interactions with the GK-AIMS project had produced limited change on individual (2.2) and organizational (1.6) interest in learning from or using planning information provided by other organizations.

Table 5. Effectiveness of methods used to help partners use or benefit from the planning information provided by other GK partners. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not effective” and number 4 “very effective”.

	No. of responses	Avg. rating
Providing an easy to use website	19	3.6
Holding seminars at your organization	12	2.5
Profiling recent contributions to GK-AIMS at GKP meetings	15	2.9
Profiling recent contributions in the “Partners” newsletter	12	3.0
Profiling recent contributions on the GKP listserv	11	3.2
Providing country/organization/status reports on the website	12	2.9
Providing custom reports on the website	14	2.8
Providing customized e-mail based reports	12	2.8

Table 6. Ratings of how well GK-AIMS supports the main objectives of the GK Partnership. Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not well” and number 4 “very well”.

	No. of responses	Avg. rating
To build a collective understanding of how knowledge and information, especially through the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), can change the nature of development	29	2.7
To disseminate “knowledge for development” information	28	2.7
To facilitate communication among GKP members in order to encourage collaborative activity	28	2.7
To help communications and feedback to GKP members on a wide range of “knowledge for development” projects and policies	27	2.5
To help organizations around the world build capacity in effectively developing, sharing and applying knowledge	27	2.4
To facilitate collaboration among the different GKP groups, including regional networks, leading to innovative models and joint projects involving multiple sectors	28	2.4
To expand the opportunities for developing countries to play equal roles in decision-making	26	2.0
To initiate pilot projects	26	2.1

Table 7. Actions taken by individual or organization as a result of involvement with GK-AIMS (number who responded to question was 23).

	No. of responses
Increased cooperation with a fellow partner of the GKP	7
Learned more about the activities of other GKP partners	19
Decided to become more involved in the knowledge and ICT field	6
Attended an event that I would otherwise not have known about	5
Developed a new project	3
Developed a different type of project	4
Collaborated with a new partner	6
Co-funded a project with another donor	0
Made changes to the design of a project	3
Decided not to fund a project	0

Support for the Objectives of GK Partnership — Respondents believe that GK-AIMS has been equally effective (2.7) in helping the GK Partnership to disseminate “knowledge for development” information, to facilitate communication among GKP members in order to encourage collaborative activity, and to build a collective understanding of how knowledge and information can change the nature of development (Table 6). Other GKP objectives were rated to have been supported from between 2.5 and 2.0.

Actions Taken as a Result of GK-AIMS — Asked what actions they had taken as a result of their involvement with GK-AIMS, 83% of respondents reported that they had learned more about the activities of other GKP partners. Thirty percent reported that they had increased cooperation with a fellow partner of the GKP, and 26% decided to become more involved in the knowledge and ICT field or collaborated with a new partner (Table 7). Although the numbers are low, GK partners have as a result of their involvement with GK-AIMS, developed new projects, developed different types of projects, and made changes to the design of projects.

Provision of Feedback — Of the 30 people who responded to this question, 30% believed that the feedback they provided had a positive impact on the design and development of GK-AIMS and the tools and methods that were used to meet the project’s objectives; whereas, 13% felt their feedback had not been used. A large proportion (57%) reported that they had not

provided any feedback to GK-AIMS.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This evaluation was designed to answer six questions about GK-AIMS. The conclusions and recommendations are therefore grouped around these questions. One additional conclusion is made about what can be learned for future evaluations. The summary of the finding that was prepared for GK II is included in Appendix 4.

Are there flaws in the design or underlying assumptions upon which GK-AIMS was based?

Partnerships must be more than words and good intentions. There must be explicit agreement and commitment to share and a clear benefit to doing so. GK-AIMS appears to have been based on an assumption that if the partners were provided with the appropriate set of tools, they would increase their sharing of project information. This evaluation confirms that the appropriate tools alone are not a sufficient condition for increased sharing.

GK-AIMS must be a response to a real need. If GK-AIMS responded to an expressed need of a group of partners, then committing resources to using and learning GK-AIMS would make sense to the institution because these actions would “deliver” value to the institution making the investments. GK-AIMS must exist for a real “reason,” not just as an experiment in information sharing, if it really wants to be used for meaningful information sharing and not simply be seen as a novel experiment.

Perhaps the scope of information sharing that GK-AIMS seeks to encourage was too broad given the level of input required for a “start-up” initiative. A focus on information sharing on a specific subject might be a good starting point; in other words, specialization in sharing of information about a singularly important topic for a group of GK partners. Discussions during GK II may have suggested potential areas of specialization.

GK-AIMS placed its focus on working with program staff. This appears to have been well-founded because these are the people who are responsible for managing project information (especially planning information). These people are the ones who can benefit from information sharing most directly. However, it is also clear that senior decision-makers must be part of institutional buy-in if additional resources must be allocated to such information sharing. Staff must also derive value in sharing. Institutional “rewards” are for doing not for sharing; therefore, sharing tends to be a secondary priority. In some cases, there are also institutional concerns about sharing information before project documents are negotiated and finalized. Institutional

engagement continues to be difficult for GK-AIMS to establish, and to be effective, inroads must be made at the most senior level. Users believe that a “top-down” approach is required if organizations are to make conscious efforts to contribute information and dedicate the required resources to ensure this occurs.

A focus on program staff seems reasonable. However, GK-AIMS should also ensure that it does not alienate or cause rifts between information staff and program staff. This is particularly so in organizations that are still grappling with the creation of information management systems. Many organizations could benefit from closer links between those who are using information systems and those who are responsible for creating them.

The hands-on, labour-intensive, approach of the project appears to have been the most successful methods used to build a constituency for GK-AIMS. However, overall success has been low in changing individual and institutional willingness and ability to share information. This harkens back to the earlier point about the need for a “demand” for the information sharing tools. The product must match needs to allow successful marketing. Nonetheless, promoting a novel concept can be expected to be difficult, and will always face a “chicken and egg” dilemma.

The concept of a distributed database, with individual organizations taking responsibility for their own information, is a model of information sharing that is worth promoting. However, a distributed database does not preclude the need for management of the system by a central hub. This hub must be active in monitoring activity in GK-AIMS and in noting problems or lack of information flow. Participation requires institutional commitment, but must be supported by strong management and leadership. Especially during the start-up phase, active monitoring and encouragement is critical to garner participation. A great deal of energy is required to launch and successfully establish any system that depends on collaboration among a diverse group of partners. Perhaps the amount of energy and time required was underestimated.

Therefore:

- Efforts to promote GK-AIMS should point to positive outcomes of collaboration. These efforts could include sharing “success stories” from partners as well as pulling information from GK-AIMS and demonstrating to its partners (at specific times and for specific purposes) how this information could be used to improve the performance of their project planning and development activities.

- GK-AIMS might consider a focus on exchanging information in a few key areas, rather than tackling the whole information and communication field. The areas that are chosen should be those that are important to a group of partners who have expressed a clear desire to collaborate for a specific purpose.
- In addition to working with program staff, GK-AIMS must engage senior decision-makers in discussions and demonstrate practical benefits and returns that can accrue to the sharing of planning information.
- GK-AIMS should, when necessary, engage information staff in discussions about the establishment of information management systems, not just program staff.
- GK-AIMS should continue to promote the idea and benefits of a distributed database, but must recognize the need to place greater emphasis on central management to encourage contributions and demonstrate and promote “successes”.
- Because almost 60% of users have not provided feedback about the design or development of GK-AIMS. More active engagement of users in discussions about their needs and the design and implementation of GK-AIMS may be required.

Are the tools and methods that were used sound and appropriate?

Communication and encouragement from GK-AIMS staff is the most effective of the methods used to influence willingness to share or use planning information in GK-AIMS, but this effectiveness is limited.

As more organizations explore the use of the Internet to share information about their organization and its project, they perceive conflicts between managing and maintaining their own systems and making contributions to external systems such as GK-AIMS. Organizations are expending resources now on their own information delivery mechanisms (predominantly websites) and this trend can be expected to continue. Some partners think that it is only necessary to establish links to individual webpages, not collect data in an external, centralized, location.

Users who are willing to share information want data entry to be automated, and as much as possible be seamless with the systems of information management they already use. GK-AIMS cannot be seen as a competing system, it must be a complementary one. The ideal scenario would be if GK-AIMS were the initial project information management system introduced in an organization.

The decision to use a web-based system that provides a common space for information sharing is an interesting concept and one appears to be worthy of continued testing. Users most prefer an easy to use website as the system interface. Web-based forms were the preferred method of data-entry method for half of the users. One quarter would prefer to use IDML/XML. Some of the partners do admitted that they did not understanding the technical differences among the various options that are available for information sharing.

Most GK partners do not have time to (or do not want to) check GK-AIMS on regular basis to find out what is new. They want to have an auto-alert mechanism that points to new information that is added in the system. They would prefer that these alerts be sent by email on a regular interval (perhaps monthly) and be tailored to a personal profile of their interests.

Therefore:

- GK-AIMS should continue to explore innovative ways to help GK partners use a common web space to share information.
- As part of its marketing efforts, GK-AIMS must demonstrate the benefits of a single data source compared with a series of linked databases on individual institutional websites.
- Because of conflicting demands on time, methods of data entry must be “seamless” and require little or no extra effort on behalf fo those responsible for providing data to GK-AIMS.
- Methods of information delivery should be tailored to the information requirements of users, and be designed to automatically alert users (on regular intervals) to new information in their specific areas of interest.
- Given the increase in the number of partner website, GK-AIMS may wish to examine the use of “spider” type technology to retrieve data from these sites for inclusion in GK-AIMS.
- Some partners were unaware of the technical options available to them; therefore, some additional “training” of partners may be necessary.

What factors affect whether people will or will not share project information or enter data into a database system?

As stated earlier, GK-AIMS must be seen to provide direct benefits to its users, be easy to use, and not be seen as a duplication of effort. Until these “problems” or “perceptions” are addressed, it will continue to be difficult to encourage greater participation in GK-AIMS. The GKP

Secretariat could also play a more supportive role.

Any future strategy for GK-AIMS must recognize that there is still resistance to the concept of a shared database, and that some organizations are yet to be convinced of its utility. Some partners perceive GK-AIMS to be a donor-driven initiative and wonder what real benefit it offers them. They believe that broader development-community participation is required if GK-AIMS is to be successful. Other organizations question the need for GK-AIMS because they see their own websites as viable alternatives. Websites are used by three-quarters of all organizations now to share project information, information on their organization, and forward planning information. If additional, external, efforts are to be made to share information, partners want evidence that information sharing really does lead to better projects. Some leads are suggested in the responses of users and might be worth pursuing.

Greater effort is needed to get more organizations to contribute project information to GK-AIMS. There continues to be organizational reluctance to share information about planned or proposed projects. All organizations that do share project information share information about on-going projects, but only half provide information on planned projects. Users recognize the limited quality of information in the database, which is seen as incomplete and out-of-date. As a result, the appeal to both to use and contribute information is reduced. GK-AIMS may need to develop incentives (initially perhaps offer financial support to help organizations contribute) to encourage organizations to share information, or perhaps develop specialized “subsets” of information in specific fields.

Some users also see GK-AIMS as a duplication of effort. As more organizations develop websites, there are competing demands for time and effort to maintain and manage these sites as well as their own project-management systems. Users also reported that sharing of reports and documents is constrained by the work needed to convert these documents to html (these types of information are shared least often on GK-AIMS). Users are also wary of the high transaction costs involved in using GK-AIMS. These costs are associated both with the submission of information as well as with possible increases in requests for information and followup if GK-AIMS become successful and highly used.

Users have little allegiance to any one information source. They search many sources to find what they want. However, most often they depend on direct sharing of information, both through

personal contacts and between organizations, for the project information they need for their jobs. They have established links based on needs, and believe these to be efficient and effective. Thus, they ask the question: Why do they need GK-AIMS? It remains the job of the GKP to answer this question.

Therefore:

- GK-AIMS should place more emphasis on gathering and distributing evidence that the sharing of project information can make a difference to project performance. A mechanism is needed to capture such success stories and generally encourage feedback from users.
- Additional interaction is needed with users to determine how to link their present web efforts with input and sharing via GK-AIMS.
- GK-AIMS must ensure that its users understand the system and how to interact with it. For example, misconceptions, such as the need to convert documents to HTML before they can be added to the reports database, must be cleared up.
- Methods need to be sought to as much as possible reduce the transaction costs associated with contributing information to GK-AIMS. It may be necessary as well to look for ways to address and answer followup questions (like FAQs or some other mechanism) to reduce user concerns over handling extra requests for information if the system works well.

Has GK-AIMS made changes in how information is shared among GK partners?

GK-AIMS has helped the GKP enunciate its objectives, supported the dissemination of “knowledge for development” information, and facilitated communication among partners. Users feel that GK-AIMS is one of few tangible outputs of GKP — that “GK-AIMS gives some flesh to the GKP body”. However, the GKP Secretariat must do more to support and contribute to GK-AIMS. Some of GKP organizations do not actively share project information through GK-AIMS or keep information up-to-date. How can other partners be expected to do so, if members of the Secretariat are deficit in their efforts?

GK-AIMS has had success in raising awareness of information needs in GKP organizations and demonstrating the gaps that exist. Some organizations now recognize that their information management systems do not work as they would like. These organizations are thus in an unfavourable position when seeking to share information with others. The differences between

partners in their ability to manage and access information are quite wide, and this should be considered as future plans for GK-AIMS are developed.

Users most often reported that they had “learned more about the activities of other GKP partners” as a result of their interactions with GK-AIMS. This suggests that GK-AIMS has created greater awareness and supplemented the methods that had previously used by these partners to collect information on similar-minded organizations. This is a positive change, but perhaps the easiest to achieve.

Therefore:

- GKP Secretariat members must dedicate themselves to ensuring that they are contributing timely and complete information to GK-AIMS.
- GK-AIMS should be given more prominence on the GKP website and be present as an active sharing mechanism not one that is “under development”. This would help establish the credentials of GK-AIMS.
- In certain cases, GK-AIMS could provide a “turn-key system” for members that a trying to establish information management systems. These systems could address internal information management needs while helping to share information with other partners.

Have any of the GK partners derived benefit from GK-AIMS? For example, with regard to developing new projects or different types of projects, or collaborating with new partners.

More than 80% of users reported that because of GK-AIMS they had learned of activities of other GKP partners, and a quarter had increased their collaboration with fellow GKP organizations, decided to become more involved in the knowledge and ICT field, or collaborated with a new partner. It is this type of information that needs to be collected and shared with partners to provide real examples of the benefits sharing can produce. Only two people reported that they had changed the design of a project, but these could provide interesting case studies. None of the partners reported cofunding of a project or deciding not to fund a project, but such occurrences in the future should be captured.

Therefore:

- GK-AIMS should place emphasis on gathering evidence of collaborative activity among its users and take care to document these cases and share them with its network of users by using listservs (not just its own but other appropriate lists) and by posting such news

on its website and by encouraging its partners to write articles about their experiences.

- GK-AIMS should place greater emphasis on developing partnerships among its partners, and then present the tool (GK-AIMS) to make sharing and collaboration easier.

Are other project information systems available and being used by GK partners?

Partners are increasingly depending on their own websites to disseminate institutional and project information. Very few of the partners suggested that they used other external project information systems such as INDIX. Users by and large depend on direct personal contacts to gather the external project information they require. When necessary, they visit other websites to look for the information they need and have no allegiance to any one source.

Therefore:

- GK-AIMS needs to continue to seek ways to demonstrate tangible benefits of having a centralized information source compared with individual websites.
- GK-AIMS may wish to consider specializing as a source of information resources in a limited number of fields to demonstrate the practicality of the approach. GK-AIMS needs to become one of those “personal” contacts for its partners.

Future evaluations

A integral part of the planning of this evaluation was a preliminary survey of key stakeholders (InfoDev, GKP Secretariat, and Bellanet) to determine what they wanted to learn about GK-AIMS. Input from this initial interaction was reviewed and discussed at a roundtable meeting of Bellanet staff. These discussions helped define the objectives of the evaluation and arrive at consensus on the questions the evaluation should address. This meeting also provided the evaluator with an extremely useful review of the context and hoped for outcomes of the project. The importance of commitment from the project manager to learning from the evaluation (as was the case here) is also critical. Every effort was made in the design of this evaluation to ensure that it would be about “learning lessons” that could be applied to future activities.

Therefore:

- If evaluations are to produce results that are actually going to be used, they must clearly provide information that those who commission the evaluation can use to make decisions. The preliminary email questionnaire and roundtable discussion used in this evaluation proved to be useful ways to engage key stakeholders in the design of the objectives of the

evaluation. These methods should be considered in the design of similar studies.

Appendix 1: Survey of Key Stakeholders

As Shady Kanfi has told you, I have been asked to undertake an evaluation of GK-AIMS. The overall objective of the evaluation is to learn how to better manage projects that facilitate the sharing of information between GK partners. The evaluation will document the systems that have been created and the methods that have been used to facilitate participation by partners; however, its principal focus will be to determine the outcomes of this project, and to recommend a future course of action for GK-AIMS. The evaluation also hopes to better understand how similar projects might be managed in the future.

To initiate this process, it is important that we obtain your input on: what you had hoped GK-AIMS would be able to change; the methods you expected to be used; and the partners with whom you expected GK-AIMS “champions” to work with or influence in terms of their participation in on-line project resources.

The vision of GK-AIMS was that its partners would coordinate their work through collaboration and the sharing and use of planning and project information through GK-AIMS. In this context, can you please take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

1. How did you hope GK-AIMS would be able to change how information was shared and used?
2. What did GK-AIMS do to try to change how information was shared and used?
3. Who are the key individuals and institutions GK-AIMS must work with to change the ways in which information is shared and used?
4. What would you like to learn from this evaluation about how information is shared and used by GK partners?
5. Is there anything else you would like to learn from the experiences of the GK-AIMS project?

Thank you for participating in this initial stage of the evaluation.

Please send your replies directly to me by 21 January.

Michael Graham
mgraham@achilles.net

Appendix 2: Survey of Users of GK-AIMS

I have been asked to conduct an evaluation of the GK-AIMS project and associated activities. The overall objective of the evaluation is to learn how to better facilitate the sharing of planning information between GK partners. The main focus of the evaluation is to identify lessons that can be learned and applied to future efforts; however, the evaluation is also looking at what the project is doing and how people and organizations are reacting to the project's activities. The preliminary results of the evaluation will be available at Global Knowledge II in Kuala Lumpur in March; therefore, I would greatly appreciate your early reply to this questionnaire.

Please email your reply directly to me by 18 February. All replies are CONFIDENTIAL, and no names will be associated with comments that are made.

Thank you very much for contributing to this evaluation. The questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Michael Graham
mgraham@achilles.net

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1. How would you characterize your primary responsibility within your organization? Please place an "x" in the () to indicate your reply. Select all that are applicable.

- ☐ manage project/program information
- ☐ plan and develop projects/programs
- ☐ manage centralized information system
- ☐ provide technical management or support
- ☐ provide administrative management or support
- ☐ executive/senior manager
- ☐ librarian
- ☐ public information or communications officer
- ☐ other (please specify)

2. How important to your job is the sharing of these types of information with other organizations? Please rate the level of importance of sharing each type of information on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "not important" and number 4 "very important".

- ☐ information about planned or proposed projects
- ☐ information about on-going projects
- ☐ information about completed projects
- ☐ organizational profiles
- ☐ upcoming events and workshops
- ☐ policy papers
- ☐ reports on ICTs and development
- ☐ other (please specify)

3. Who within your organization is responsible for managing project planning and monitoring information?

- ☐ senior manager
- ☐ project or program staff
- ☐ technical or administrative support staff
- ☐ staff in centralized information management department
- ☐ public information or communications officer
- ☐ librarian
- ☐ other (please specify)

4. Which of these sources of information do you use in your daily work to obtain the information you need about development projects and programs? Please rate the importance of each on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing “not important” and number 4 “very important”.

- ☐ GK-AIMS
- ☐ INDIX
- ☐ other websites
- ☐ publications and newsletters
- ☐ direct sharing of information with other organizations
- ☐ personal contacts
- ☐ other (please specify)

5. Does your organization share information via the GK-AIMS system?

- ☐ yes (please skip to question 7)
- ☐ rarely (please skip to question 7)
- ☐ no (please answer question 6 and then skip to question 15)
- ☐ don't know (please answer question 6 and then skip to question 15)

6. Why do you not share information using GK-AIMS? Please select all replies that are applicable.

- ☐ do not think it is a good way to communicate with my partners in the GKP
- ☐ no information to share
- ☐ institutional policy does not allow information to be shared
- ☐ it is a duplication of effort, we use a different system to make information public
- ☐ GK-AIMS system is difficult to use
- ☐ GK-AIMS is stored on an Internet server located in Bellanet
- ☐ don't have the time, takes too long
- ☐ need to learn more about the technology before I can use the system
- ☐ my access to the Internet is too slow to use GK-AIMS effectively
- ☐ believe too few organizations participate in GK-AIMS, therefore I see little return
- ☐ do not see value in adding information
- ☐ other (please explain)

SECTION 2: SHARING INFORMATION VIA GK-AIMS

7. Who in your organization is responsible for entering information into GK-AIMS?

- ☐ do it myself
- ☐ someone else does it on my behalf
- ☐ other (please explain)

8. What kind of information does your organization provide? Please select all replies that are applicable.

- ☐ organizational profile
- ☐ information on completed projects
- ☐ information on on-going projects
- ☐ information on planned/proposed projects
- ☐ information on events and workshops
- ☐ documents and reports
- ☐ other (please describe)

9. Which of the following methods would you most prefer to use to enter data into the GK-AIMS system?

- ☐ manually export data from my internal database to GK-AIMS
- ☐ enter data into web-based forms
- ☐ use a customized web-based project pipeline that automatically feeds information to GK-AIMS
- ☐ use IDML/XML automated data transfers
- ☐ do not understand the technical differences between these options
- ☐ other (please specify)

10. The GK-AIMS project tries to increase your and your organization's WILLINGNESS to share planning information with other GK partners by using a variety of methods. Please rate the effectiveness of each of these methods on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "not effective" and number 4 "very effective". Please rate all that are applicable.

- ☐ communications and encouragement from GK-AIMS staff
- ☐ face-to-face visits by GK-AIMS staff
- ☐ training and awareness sessions
- ☐ communications and encouragement from the GKP Secretariat
- ☐ the need to prepare for GK II in Kuala Lumpur
- ☐ the use of systems that automatically feed information into GK-AIMS
- ☐ being presented with evidence that others are using the system
- ☐ other factors (please specify)

11. The GK-AIMS project tries to support your and your organization's ABILITY to share planning information with other GK partners by using a variety of methods. Please rate the effectiveness of each of these methods on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "not effective" and number 4 "very effective". Please rate all that are applicable.

- ☐ communications from GK-AIMS staff
- ☐ face-to-face visits by GK-AIMS staff
- ☐ communications and encouragement from the GKP Secretariat
- ☐ the use of systems that automatically feed information into GK-AIMS
- ☐ email and telephone support
- ☐ training materials
- ☐ training seminars
- ☐ other factors (please specify)

12. How much have your interactions with the GK-AIMS project changed your and your organization's willingness to share planning information? Please indicate your response on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "no change" and number 4 "very large change".

- ☐ amount of personal change
- ☐ amount of organizational change

13. In what ways has GK-AIMS changed the type of information you now share publically? Please select all replies that are applicable.

- ☐ no change in the project information we share
- ☐ we now share more project information than we used to
- ☐ for the first time, we share project information
- ☐ for the first time, we share information about projects that are under development/discussion
- ☐ we now share key documents, reports, and papers
- ☐ we now share information about upcoming events and workshops
- ☐ other (please specify)

14. Do you use other methods or systems to share project information, information on your organization, or forward-planning information with your partners or the public?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

If you answered "yes", please indicate what methods or systems you use.

SECTION 3: BENEFITING FROM INFORMATION IN GK-AIMS

15. Does your organization use the information that is available in the GK-AIMS system?

- ☐ yes (please skip to question 17)
- ☐ rarely (please skip to question 17)
- ☐ no (please answer question 16 and then skip to question 20)
- ☐ don't know (please answer question 6 and then skip to question 20)

16. Why do you not use the information in GK-AIMS? Please select all replies that are applicable.

- ☐ have never visited the GK-AIMS website
- ☐ information that is available is not useful

- ☐ information that is provided is available elsewhere
- ☐ GK-AIMS system is difficult to use
- ☐ don't have the time, takes too long
- ☐ need to learn more about the technology before I can use the system
- ☐ my access to the Internet is too slow to use GK-AIMS effectively
- ☐ other (please explain)

17. What kind of information do you use in GK-AIMS? Please select all replies that are applicable.

- ☐ organizational profiles
- ☐ information on completed projects
- ☐ information on on-going projects
- ☐ information on planned/proposed projects
- ☐ information on events and workshops
- ☐ documents and reports on ICTs and development
- ☐ other (please describe)

18. The GK-AIMS project uses several methods to help you use or benefit from the planning information provided by other GK partners. Please rate the effectiveness of each of these methods on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "not effective" and number 4 "very effective". Please rate all that are applicable.

- ☐ providing an easy to use website
- ☐ holding seminars at your organization
- ☐ profiling recent contributions to GK-AIMS at GKP meetings
- ☐ profiling recent contributions to GK-AIMS in the "Partners" newsletter
- ☐ profiling recent contributions on the GKP listserv
- ☐ providing sophisticated country, organization, and status "reports" on the website
- ☐ providing custom reports on the website
- ☐ providing customized e-mail based reports
- ☐ other (please specify)

19. How much have your interactions with the GK-AIMS project changed your and your organization's interest in learning from or using planning information provided by other organizations? Please indicate your response on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "no change" and number 4 "very large change".

- ☐ amount of personal change
- ☐ amount of organizational change

SECTION 4: EFFECTIVENESS OF GK-AIMS

20. How well do you think that GK-AIMS supports each of these main objectives of the GK Partnership? Please rate the level of support provided to each objective on a scale of 1 to 4, with number 1 representing "not well" and number 4 "very well".
Call these the 'main objectives' of the GKP.

- ☐ to build a collective understanding of how knowledge and information, especially through the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), can change the nature of development
- ☐ to disseminate “knowledge for development” information
- ☐ to facilitate communication among GKP members in order to encourage collaborative activity
- ☐ to help communications and feedback to GKP members on a wide range of “knowledge for development” projects and policies
- ☐ to help organizations around the world build capacity in effectively developing, sharing and applying knowledge
- ☐ to facilitate collaboration among the different GKP groups, including regional networks, leading to innovative models and joint projects involving multiple sectors
- ☐ to expand the opportunities for developing countries to play equal roles in decision-making
- ☐ to initiate pilot projects

21. Which (if any) of the following actions have you or your organization taken as a result of your involvement with GK-AIMS? Please indicate your reply by placing an “x” in the (). Please select all replies that are applicable.

- ☐ increased cooperation with a fellow partner of the GKP
- ☐ learned more about the activities of other GKP partners
- ☐ decided to become more involved in the knowledge and ICT field
- ☐ attended an event that I would otherwise not have known about
- ☐ developed a new project
- ☐ developed a different type of project
- ☐ collaborated with a new partner
- ☐ co-funded a project with another donor
- ☐ made changes to the design of a project
- ☐ decided not to fund a project
- ☐ other (please specify)

22. Do you feel that the feedback you have provided has had a positive impact on the design/development of GK-AIMS and the tools and methods that are used to meet the project’s objectives?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ did not provide any feedback

CONCLUSION

23. In what ways do you think GK-AIMS could be made more effective?

24. Do you have anything else to add?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

1. How familiar would you say you are with the GK-AIMS project?

- ☐ not familiar
- ☐ familiar
- ☐ very familiar

2. Can you please describe how you have been involved with, or associated with, the GK-AIMS project?

3. When was the last time you personally used GK-AIMS?

4. What were your personal expectations for the GK-AIMS project when it started?

5. What do you think is the most significant or important accomplishment of this project? Why do you say this?

6. Were any of your expectations for the project not met? Why do you say this?

7. Do you think that over the last 2 years there has been a change within your organization with regard to its willingness to share information about your activities with the public?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

What change has occurred?

What role (if any) has GK-AIMS played in any change that has occurred?

8. Do you think that over the last 2 years there has been a change within your organization with regard to its willingness to share planning information (about planned or proposed projects) with your partners?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

What change has occurred?

What role (if any) has GK-AIMS played in any change that has occurred?

9. Do you think that the GK-AIMS project helps GKP achieve its main objectives?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

Please explain.

10. What changes are necessary to make GK-AIMS a more effective project?

11. Do you have anything else to add?

Appendix 4: Preliminary Conclusions (Prepared for GK II)

GK-AIMS and the GKP

- Users feel that GK-AIMS is one of few tangible outputs of GKP — that “GK-AIMS gives some flesh to the GKP body”. GK-AIMS has successfully raised awareness of information needs in GKP organizations and demonstrated the gaps that exist.
- GK-AIMS has helped the GKP enunciate its objectives and supported the dissemination of “knowledge for development” information and also facilitated communication among partners. More than 80% of users reported that because of GKAIMS they had learned of activities of other GKP partners, and a quarter had increased their collaboration with fellow GKP organizations, decided to become more involved in the knowledge and ICT field, or collaborated with a new partner.
- Some organizations do not have their information management systems working as they would like. In such cases, perhaps GK-AIMS could provide a “turn-key system” for both internal information management and information sharing with partners.

Role of GKP Secretariat

- The GKP Secretariat must solidly support and contribute to GK-AIMS. If these GKP organizations do not actively share project information and keep it up-to-date, other partners cannot be expected to do so. Model behaviour is required from members of the Secretariat.
- GK-II presents an ideal opportunity for organizations in the GKP Secretariat to reaffirm their commitment to GK-AIMS.
- The GKP Secretariat needs to help with “brand establishment” for GK-AIMS. For example, GK-AIMS should be given more prominence on the GKP website and be present as an active sharing mechanism not one that is “under development”.

Provision of Information to GK-AIMS

- Greater effort is needed to get more organizations to contribute project information to GK-AIMS. Users noted that they felt that the quality of information in the database was limited, because they believe it is incomplete and out-of-date. As a result, the appeal to both use and contribute information is reduced.
- Institutional engagement continues to be difficult to establish, and to be effective, inroads must be made at the most senior level. Users believe that a “top-down approach is required if organizations are to make conscious efforts to contribute information and dedicate the required resources to ensure this occurs.
- GK-AIMS may need to develop incentives (initially perhaps offer financial support to help organizations contribute) to encourage organizations to share information.
- There continues to be organizational reluctance to share information about planned or proposed projects. All organizations that do share project information share information about on-going projects, but only half provide information on planned projects.
- Almost 60% of users have not provided feedback about the design or development of GK-AIMS. More active engagement of users in discussions about their needs and the design and implementation of GK-AIMS may be required.

Use of Information in GK-AIMS

- Some users see GK-AIMS as a duplication of effort. As such organizations develop their own websites, GKAIMS will face competing demands as these organizations expend time and effort to maintain and manage their websites and to update their own project-management information systems.
- Users believe that to share reports and documents they must convert these documents to html (these types of information are shared least often on GK-AIMS). Users appear to be unaware that the system includes an auto-conversion feature.
- Users believe that transaction costs involved in using GK-AIMS are high both to submit information and to deal with possible increases in requests for information and followup if the system becomes successful and highly used.
- Communication and encouragement from GK-AIMS staff are the best methods to influence willingness to share planning information and use the information in GK-AIMS, but even these methods have had little effect in changing partner behaviour.
- Users have little allegiance to any one information source. As well, they depend most often on direct sharing of information, both through personal contacts and between organizations, for the project information they need for their jobs.

Features of GK-AIMS

- Users do not have time to (or do not want to) check GK-AIMS on regular basis to find out what is new. They want to have an auto-alert mechanism that points to new information that is added in the system. They would prefer that these alerts be sent by email on a regular interval (perhaps monthly) and be tailored to a personal profile of their interests.
- Data entry must be automated, and as much as possible be seamless with the systems of information management used within the GKP partner organization. GK-AIMS cannot be seen as a competing system, but as a complementary one. The ideal scenario would be if GK-AIMS were the initial project information management system introduced in an organization.
- Half of all users would prefer to use a web-based form for data-entry, and a quarter would prefer to use IDML/XML. In terms of the system interface, users want the website to be easy to use and the listserv used to highlight recent contributions to GK-AIMS.
- Organizations are expending resources now on their own information delivery mechanisms (predominantly websites). GK-AIMS should examine the use of “spider” type technology to retrieve data from these sites. However, some partners think that it is only necessary to establish links to individual webpages, not collect data in a central location.

Centralized Management

- The concept of a distributed database, with individual organizations taking responsibility for their own information, is a model that is worth promoting. However, a distributed database does not preclude the need for management of the system by a central hub. At least during the start-up phase, active monitoring and encouragement is required to garner

participation.

- The central hub must be more active in monitoring, managing, and taking leadership in the content of GK-AIMS and in noting problems or lack of information flow. Participation will not take place without strong leadership.
- The central hub might consider pulling information from GK-AIMS and demonstrating to its partners (at specific times and for specific purposes) how this information could be used to improve the performance of their project planning and development activities.
- A great deal of energy is required to launch and successfully establish any system that depends on collaboration among a diverse group of partners. GK-AIMS must be persistent in its efforts. The inputs required are analogous to the energy needed to launch a rocket. Much more effort is required to get the rocket off the ground than to keep it in space.

External Perceptions

- Some organizations are not convinced of the need for GK-AIMS. They see their own websites as viable alternatives. Websites are used by three-quarters of all organizations now to share project information, info on the organization, and forward planning information.
- Partners want evidence that information sharing really does lead to better projects or more collaborative projects (tied for most effective way to effect change). GKAIMS should place more emphasis on gathering and sharing such evidence.